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8/16/79

# TELEGRAM

INDICATE  
☐ COLLECT  
☐ CHARGE TO

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12065:  
E.O. 11652X  
TAGS:  
SUBJECT:

FROM  
AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

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XDS-1 8/16/99 (CHAPLIN, Maxwell) OR-M

SHUM AR

CLANDESTINE PRISONS **DECAPTIONED**

ACTION: SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE

INFO: USMISSION GENEVA  
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK  
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ  
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

☒ Release ( ) Excise ( ) Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: ( ) In Part ☒ In Full

( ) Classify as ( ) Extend as ( ) Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

AMB  
DCM  
POL  
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BUENOS AIRES 6707

REF: STATE 204564; STOCKHOLM 3279

1. ( ) - Entire Text.)

2. SUMMARY RESPONSE TO REFTEL. First to address the concern expressed in the State Reftel, we do not believe that extraordinary measures are being taken to prepare for the IACHR visit. The repression is continuing along recognized and previously reported lines, but with a sharp reduction in intake of victims. END SUMMARY RESPONSE.

3. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS. Argentina has had many places for clandestine interrogation -- there may have been hundreds during the thickest

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DRAFTING DATE

8/16/79

TEL. EXT.

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OPTIONAL FORM 153  
(Formerly FS-413)  
January 1975  
Dept. of State

50153-1C1

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part of the repression of subversion/terrorism.  
We have insufficient data even to guess at who  
ran which ones, how they were staffed etc. We  
believe that the delegation of authority and  
diffusion of power that marked the repression  
worked to induce each unit of the security  
services to want its own holding facility,  
although these numbers were reduced and consolida-  
tions

  
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were made as the repression wore on.

4. We cannot establish that holding prisoners for the sake of having them, or through reluctance summarily to execute them, ever played a role to create large "holding centers." Prisoners passed through interrogation experiences that varied considerably in length, then "save themselves" by cooperation with security officials (which could be followed by emergence in jail and, when at last they <sup>began to be</sup> ~~were~~ published, a PEN list, transfer to a "rehabilitation site," freedom or exfiltration from Argentina) or were executed -- a fate that <sup>it appears</sup> / also awaited prisoners "with bloody hands," whether or not they cooperated. After several weeks the possibility of a person's being "surfaced" appear to have declined sharply. Stories of anomalies abound, but the pattern described above nevertheless emerges.

5. This reasonably well known, well documented process, combined with very sharp reductions in "intake" during 1978 and 1979 lead to the Presumption that few clandestine prisoners <sup>should</sup> / remain in far fewer centers than once existed. The razing or abandonment of several centers is known.

Closures have been reported by a variety of

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sources and top members of government, for what this is worth, have given assurances that there are no clandestine centers and prisoners.

6. It is possible that ordinary (i.e. those covered by recognized government doctrine established at the beginning of the repression)
- 7 / clandestine procedures were speeded up to accommodate "housecleaning" before the visit of the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights -- a process of housecleaning facilitated by the Commission visit's postponement from May of 1979 until September. We doubt however that criteria or procedures were changed with the visit in mind, except in the sense that about November or December of last year new guidelines were given which vastly reduced disappearances in 1979 -- already down considerably in 1978 compared with previous years. This action, we believe, was motivated not by the imminence of the Commission's visit but by the spirit or exigencies that motivated the government's invitation to the Commission in the first place.

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that still

7. While we/speculate/they/exist (even if ~~as~~  
<sup>as</sup> only small holding facilities for the most recently disappeared) we have no information about specific clandestine centers still existing. We had one report speculating about the existence of such centers and killing possible prisoners. No confirmation of this report could be obtained.

8. As for a recommended course of action, our concern for the fate of prisoners who might not be acknowledged by the government has been expressed to the GOA repeatedly (See below) and we will continue to do so. If we were to make more forceful representations, there is a real risk that we would elicit a demand for hard evidence of clandestine prisoners, which our information base could not supply. Consequently we believe our efforts should continue to be to support an effective visit of the IAHRC. END  
INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY TO FINDINGS.

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it was "just a few minutes from where I was picked up." The dates cited refer to the period of interrogation of the person interviewed:

A military base near La Plata - Aug. 1976

"Somewhere near Quilmes" - one prisoner for 7 months, beginning in October of 1977; another prisoner for one month, January 1976

"Near Berazategui" for 12 days, January 1976

"A Bridge <sup>GADE</sup> Headquarters near Banfield" - this according to several prisoners, relating to various times (also "discovered" by human rights activists)

"Near Moron, Buenos Aires Province" - September 1976

"In San Miguel" (B.A. Province) - May 1976 (for 2 months)

"La Perla" near Cordoba - November 1976 (this is another location that is often described by others)

"In Bahia Blanca" - January 1977 (for four months)  
Juan  
Corner of Paseo Colon and San Juan, Buenos Aires -  
May 1977 (This facility has also been described by several former prisoners and

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admitted to have existed by a member of a security force. It has definitely been razed as part of a highway construction project.)

10. Other people interviewed have spoken of interrogation under torture at recognized prisons and police facilities: Catamarca Prison (June 1976), La Plata Prison (September 1976, and by another prisoner in 1977); police headquarters at Mendoza (March 1976), Zarate (April 1975), Mar del Plata (July 1976), Rio Cuarto (April 1976), Salta (1975), and San Miguel de Tucuman (1975).

11. More Recent Data from Secondary Sources. The government's strategy for clearing out PEN prisoners by releasing them or giving them option is to take oldest cases first, explaining why no interrogation experience in the columns above was originated later than late 1977. Worth noting too is that interrogation experiences before early 1976 were generally by police -- it was about then that the armed forces moved into large scale repression effort. More recent experiences at clandestine centers come from secondary sources. The reliability of these sources can be doubted in individual cases, but the histories given conform to a credible pattern.

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The reports concern:

The Naval Mechanics School - The most detailed report of activities there came from Horacio Maggio (B.A. A-3, 1978 B.A. 3244). Repeatedly Embassy officers have been told that activities there ceased a year ago.

Campo de Mayo - An enormous Army base outside Buenos Aires.

"Puente Doce" - on the road to Ezeiza, now razed (a former prisoner described being taken away with a number of other prisoners).

The "La Armonia Ranch" near Arana, a short distance from La Plata. / <sup>Abandoned</sup> ~~razed~~, some buildings dynamited about January 1979.

"Las Malvinas" - a jocular reference to an Air Force warehouse between Quilmes and Avellaneda. Like "Banfield" it was apparently used (in part at least) to receive prisoners from Arana.

A facility near General Paz at Ricchieri. (General Paz is the circumferential road around the Federal Capital and Ricchieri is the road leading to Ezeiza.)

10. Fragmentary reports have been received of

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clandestine centers located at La Tablada Barracks (near Buenos Aires Province's border with the Federal Capital), a building in the capital located at Rivadavia 8000, the Army Arsenal of "Viejo Bueno" near Monte Chingolo, a military base near the Buenos Aires suburb of San Justo and ~~xx~~ in La Plata (a particularly severely hit city, both in terms of terrorism and its repression) the following locations: The Federal Police's "Robberies Investigations Unit" at 55th Street number 12-13, the Marine Barracks and the Pereyra railroad station. Police stations in La Plata may have been used for interrogations of political prisoners, though these cannot of course be considered "clandestine" except in the sense that prisoners' identities were, apparently, maintained a secret.

12. No verification is ~~immediately~~ possible at this time or that any of these centers still may exist. (COMMENT:

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XXXXXXXXXXXX Swedish Embassy colleagues here tell us frankly that they have no independent information about detention centers, clandestine prisoners

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Deputy Secretary General Bayon on August 10, and to an Emboff by Col. San Roman of the Interior Ministry on July 30. The source of the reports that clandestine camps had not been entirely eliminated and the conjecture that some prisoners were being killed (B.A. 6150) was an official of a GOA security service who was not in a position to have full information regarding possible centers. We considered his speculation was informed, though it was unsupported by any confirming reports. The reliability of this source is questionable, since he has been authorized to talk with us by his superiors, and is used on occasion to convey information the GOA wants to get before us. As a government agent it seems improbable that he would invent information detrimental to his own employers, yet he gave detrimental testimony and there exists the possibility there is truth to his reports.

16. The reasoning behind these assertions is more of interest. Our contact commented that "the truth of the matter is that centers are no longer

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needed." Sharply diminished pickups, he led us to reason (perhaps 600 in 1978, as opposed to considerably more in the years preceding) simply closed the detention centers by attrition -- for those who were brought into the system of interrogation either "saved themselves" (quoting Col. San Roman) or did not. No one tells us precisely that those who did not save themselves were executed, but the implication is inescapable and would not be denied under the informal, even friendly circumstances in which our conversations take place. (~~But~~ It was General Viola himself who used the phrase "the forever absent" -- "los ausentes ~~permanentes~~ para siempre" in his May 29 Army day speech, a term we assume was well calculated to describe the disappeared.)

17. What, then, is the likelihood that prisoners taken into the system during 1978 may still be alive? How long can the interrogation process last? Here there is no answer given, no hint even. "How long is a piece of string?" The clearest discernible answer is "until a person's intelligence usefulness is at an end, which may include a period of a person's bargaining for his life. If a person has not been killed and

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has been cooperative he may be able to save himself through bargaining -- via PEN, exfiltration from Argentina, outright release. This source opined that so long as the security forces had prisoners which they wished to question there would be clandestine facilities for doing so. He suspected that the Army had some and assumed that the other services did as well. If some prisoners entering such interrogation centers in the past had never emerged alive, he assumed the same would happen now. Based on our questioning of him, this source's views are based on the logic that since the system operated in a way to eliminate some prisoners in the past, it is probably still doing so, though on a scale reflecting the far smaller intake. We have no reliable reports or information to support the statements of this one source.

18. Conclusions. We continue to believe that the likelihood of there being significant numbers of clandestine prisoners is small. If there are such prisoners they probably number in the few hundreds at the most. Others taken into the system of interrogation are dead or released or under PEN. We continue to fail to imagine why the GOA would keep significant numbers of prisoners beyond some

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kind of perceived intelligence usefulness, a usefulness which is quickly demonstrated or not. The system of "processing" prisoners has probably not been altered, even considering the imminence of the Inter-American Commission's visit. What was altered dramatically, most recently by new orders given in November of last year, were the criteria for entering the system -- with the effect of practically cutting out new entrants to the system beginning about January of 1979. The 1978 number showed a significant decrease from 1977.

19. Recommendation: On the basis of the speculation that some unacknowledged prisoners still remain in the system, there is a strong urge to make representation to the GOA for their welfare. This was what prompted the Ambassador's raising the topic with General Viola and the Foreign Minister, and the questions of Army and Interior Ministry officials and our security service source. We have no doubts that the GOA is aware of our concern for any such prisoners. We will continue to express this concern. In part because of that, special representations would have to be very forceful. That kind of representation

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would, at this point, probably elicit from General Viola the reaction that he has ordered that prisoners be delivered to judicial authorities, and he would take action on any case in which we could give him specific information. Our information is not adequate to respond to such a request. It seems highly likely that this is the reason that the Nuncio is unprepared to make a demarche on this subject. (Stockholm 3279) In this situation it seems best to continue to support an effective visit of the IAHR.

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